

The Perception of Islamic Schools and Its Influence on Students' Interest in Continuing Education at State Islamic Senior High Schools

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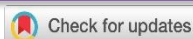
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Abstract

The perception of a school represents how society evaluates an institution or organization based on experiences and observations, creating either a positive or negative impression that impacts the institution's sustainability. Students' interest can be defined as their intrinsic inclination to select the best educational institution, which emerges consciously from within. This study aims to analyze the influence of Islamic school perception on students' interest in continuing their education at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah for the 2023/2024 academic year. A quantitative research method was employed, using random sampling techniques and Slovin's formula. The study population comprised 427 tenth-grade students, with a sample size of 207 students. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire with four response options. Validity tests utilized the Pearson Product-Moment correlation, and reliability tests were conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, supported by SPSS software version 20. Data were analyzed through simple linear regression and coefficient of determination. The results revealed a calculated t-value of 4.587 with a significance level of 0.00, while the critical t-value at $df = 205$ and $\alpha = 0.05$ was 1.652. Since $t_{\text{calculated}} > t_{\text{table}}$ ($4.587 > 1.652$) and the significance level of $0.00 < 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. The correlation coefficient was 0.307 with a constant of 37.458, indicating that a 1% increase in school perception (X) would enhance student interest (Y) by 0.307. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 28.7%, showing that school perception positively influenced students' interest, while the remaining 71.3% was attributed to other factors not examined in this study. In conclusion, the perception of Islamic schools significantly affects students' interest in continuing their education at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah. These findings underscore the importance of efforts by Islamic schools to build a positive image to enhance their appeal and attract prospective students.

Keywords: Education; Islamic Schools; School Perception; Students' Interest.

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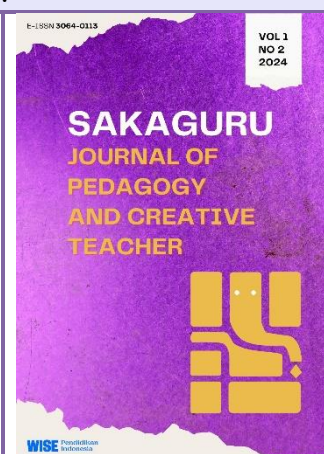
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INTRODUCTION

The realm of education is becoming increasingly competitive and challenging [1], [2], [3]. Educational institutions are no longer merely providers of educational services but are now expected to function as entities capable of delivering the highest quality education [4], [5]. This intensified competition is driven by the growing number of educational institutions, particularly at the senior high school level [6], [7]. This growth has spurred a race among institutions to build trust with prospective students to increase their enrollment interest.

In this context, senior high schools that are unprepared to face such competition or lack a competitive advantage will inevitably feel the impact, such as a decline in the number of new applicants. Consequently, institutions undertake various strategies to attract prospective students, including promotional efforts, facility development, and improving the quality of educational services.

For parents and students, selecting a senior high school is a critical decision that significantly influences their future [8], [9]. This selection process involves considerations of personal potential, future orientation, and student interest [10], [11]. The decision encompasses choices among Senior High Schools (SMA), Vocational High Schools (SMK), and Islamic Senior High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah, MA). Madrasahs, as educational institutions with an Islamic identity, play a strategic role in shaping future leaders with both Islamic and nationalistic values [12]. One of the key strengths of madrasahs lies in their integration of religious and general knowledge. Although historically undervalued, madrasahs are increasingly gaining recognition and appreciation within society due to their improved educational quality [13], [14], [15].

Interest, a crucial factor in decision-making, is defined as a person's attraction to an object without external coercion [16]. In the context of education, interest in enrolling at a school is akin to interest in purchasing a service, involving an attraction to the offerings provided. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), purchase interest reflects behavior that emerges as a response to an object, indicating a desire to select or acquire it. In this case, students act as consumers who choose schools based on their interests and preferences.

The image of a school plays a crucial role in shaping students' interest in choosing a madrasah [17], [18]. A positive image reflects high-quality education, which is a primary concern for stakeholders, including the government, teachers, parents, and the students themselves. Similar to commercial products, educational institutions must cultivate a strong and favorable image to attract prospective students and increase enrollment numbers.

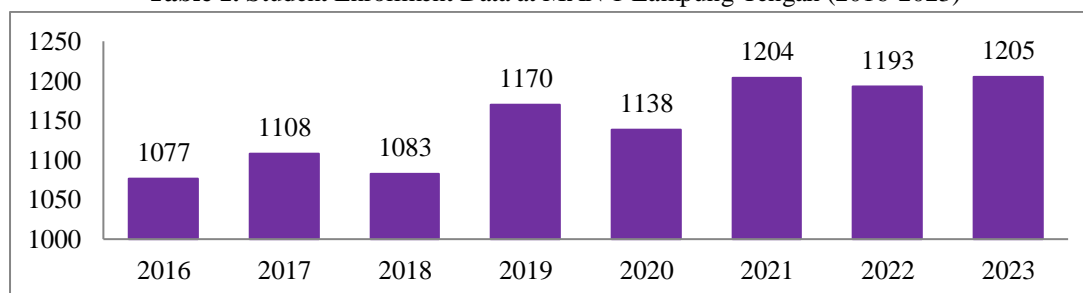
Relevant research was conducted by Fhadilah & Naf'an Tarihoran (2022), titled *Marketing Strategies of Vocational Schools and Students' Interest in Continuing Studies Towards Admissions at Madrasah Aliyah*. The findings revealed a significant influence of educational marketing strategies and student interest on the new student admissions (PPDB) at private Madrasah Aliyah [19].

Previous studies, such as Fhadilah & Naf'an Tarihoran (2022), focused on the impact of marketing strategies on student admissions at private Madrasah Aliyah, leaving the role of school perception in shaping student interest largely unexplored. Additionally, limited attention has been given to state-run Islamic schools like MAN 1 Lampung Tengah. This study fills the gap by examining the influence of school perception on student interest, providing

insights specific to public Islamic education and its unique challenges in attracting prospective students.

MAN 1 Lampung Tengah, the only state-run Islamic senior high school in its region, has gained community trust through its achievements, including an "A (Excellent)" accreditation in 2022 with a score of 94. The school fosters a positive image by promoting a strong culture, utilizing online media, providing quality facilities, offering scholarships, and ensuring affordable tuition, reflecting its commitment to public trust and student interest.

Table 1. Student Enrollment Data at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah (2016-2023)



Source: Administrative Documents of MAN 1 Lampung Tengah, 2023

Based on Table 1.1, the number of students enrolled at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah from 2016 to 2023 experienced fluctuations. In 2016, the student population reached 1,077. This increased to 1,108 in 2017 but decreased to 1,083 in 2018. In 2019, enrollment rose again to 1,170 but slightly declined to 1,138 in 2020. In 2021, the number of students increased to 1,204, followed by a slight decrease to 1,193 in 2022. By 2023, the student population rose again to 1,205. Despite these fluctuations, the student enrollment at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah has remained relatively stable over the past three years (2021–2023). Annual variations in student numbers may be influenced by several factors, including the school's image. Furthermore, in 2023, 232 students from MAN 1 Lampung Tengah were accepted into public universities through the National Selection Based on Achievement (SNBP), National Selection for State Islamic Universities (SPAN-PTKIN), and the National Test-Based Selection (SNBT) pathways.

Table 2. Student Admission Data at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah Over the Last Three Years

No	Academic Year	Number of Applicants	Number of Students Admitted
1	2021/2022	510 students	390
2	2022/2023	474 students	379
3	2023/2024	540 students	427

Source: Administrative Documents of MAN 1 Lampung Tengah, 2023

MAN 1 Lampung Tengah implements an online new student admission system (PPDB) for regular, tahfiz, and olympiad classes. As shown in Table 1.2, during the 2021/2022 academic year, MAN 1 Lampung Tengah received 510 applicants, admitting 390 students. In the 2022/2023 academic year, there were 474 applicants, with 379 students admitted. For the 2023/2024 academic year, the number of applicants increased to 540, demonstrating consistently high interest in MAN 1 Lampung Tengah, likely driven by the institution's positive image.

This data prompted the researchers to explore further the impact of school perception on students' interest in continuing education at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah. Consequently, this study was conducted under the title, *"The Influence of School Perception on Students' Interest in Continuing Education at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Lampung Tengah"*.

METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative approach, a research method rooted in positivist philosophy aimed at investigating specific populations or samples. Data collection was carried out using research instruments and subsequently analyzed quantitatively or statistically. The primary objective of this approach is to describe and test predetermined hypotheses. This research falls under the category of field studies, conducted directly with predetermined respondents. It is associative in nature, seeking to explore causal relationships or influences between independent and dependent variables. Specifically, the study aims to determine whether there is a significant effect of school perception on students' interest in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Lampung Tengah.

Data for this study were collected using two methods: questionnaires and documentation. Questionnaires were distributed to 10th-grade students at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah to assess the influence of school perception on student interest, while documentation involved analyzing school records, including demographics and facilities. From a population of 427 students, a purposive sample of 207 respondents was selected using the Slovin formula. This sample size was deemed sufficient to represent the population.

Validated and reliable instruments ensured accurate data collection through questionnaires and documentation of school records, including demographics and profiles. Statistical tests for normality, linearity, and homogeneity confirmed analysis prerequisites. Hypothesis testing, using simple linear regression and the coefficient of determination, was performed with IBM SPSS Statistics version 20 for precision. To effectively investigate the relationship between school perception and students' interest, a structured implementation process was followed, ensuring methodological rigor and accuracy in data collection and analysis. The key steps in the process are outlined below:

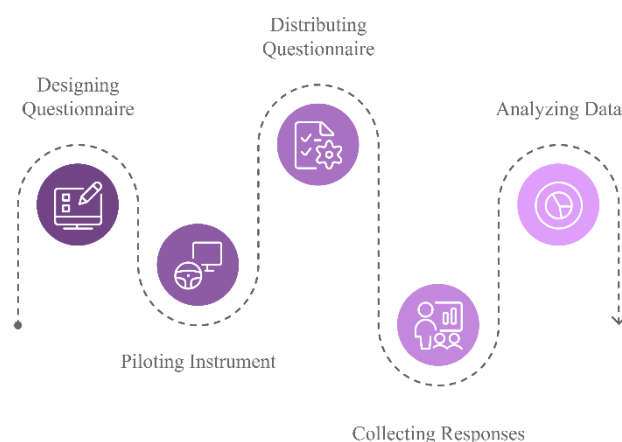


Figure 1. Research Study Implementation Process

Based on **Figure 1** above, the implementation process of this study involved a series of systematic steps, beginning with the design of questionnaires aligned with the research

objectives. The designed instruments were then tested to ensure their validity and reliability before being distributed to 10th-grade students at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah. Following the structured data collection process, statistical tools were employed to analyze the data and test the established hypotheses. These steps were meticulously designed to ensure the accuracy of the data and the reliability of the findings.

The impact of this study was evaluated by analyzing the relationship between school perception and students' interest through statistical measures, including the coefficient of determination and hypothesis testing. These methods quantified the extent to which school perception influenced students' decisions to continue their education at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah. Feedback from students and school stakeholders was also considered to assess practical implications and community perceptions. This comprehensive evaluation provided insights into how school reputation affects educational choices, offering valuable recommendations for enhancing community engagement and improving institutional strategies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Marketing management is the art and science of selecting target markets while striving to attract, retain, and grow the customer base by creating, delivering, and communicating superior value to them. It can also be defined as the effort to plan, execute (encompassing organization, direction, and coordination), and oversee marketing activities within an organization to achieve its objectives efficiently and effectively [20]. According to Kotler and Keller, marketing is a social and managerial process through which individuals and groups fulfill their needs and desires by creating, offering, and exchanging valuable products with others [21].

Marketing involves activities such as conceptual planning, pricing, promotion, distribution of ideas, and creating opportunities to meet individual needs while aligning with organizational goals. In the context of this research, marketing refers specifically to educational marketing. As defined by M. Munir, educational marketing is a social and managerial process where individuals or groups fulfill their needs and desires by creating and exchanging services. These services include the quality and quantity of schools or educational institutions and the teaching systems they offer, promoted or sold to users of educational services [22].

Image in Long Term Marketing

One of the most effective long-term marketing strategies is building brand image. According to Philip Kotler, image refers to a set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions an individual holds about an object, heavily influenced by how the object is perceived [21]. Simply put, image can also be defined as the public's perception of a company or product.

In the context of education, a school's image reflects how the community views an institution, based on the information, knowledge, and understanding they possess. This assessment ultimately forms impressions, whether positive or negative, that influence the institution's reputation [23].

The Process of Image Formation

Image is formed through a process where external stimuli influence individual responses. These stimuli may be accepted or rejected, depending on the information received. The process of image formation involves several stages:

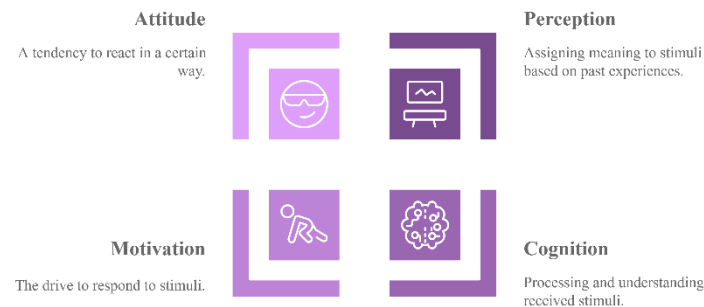


Figure 2. Image Formation Process

Institutional image does not develop spontaneously; it requires strategic efforts to create and enhance it. According to Schiffman and Kanuk [24], five key factors shape brand image:

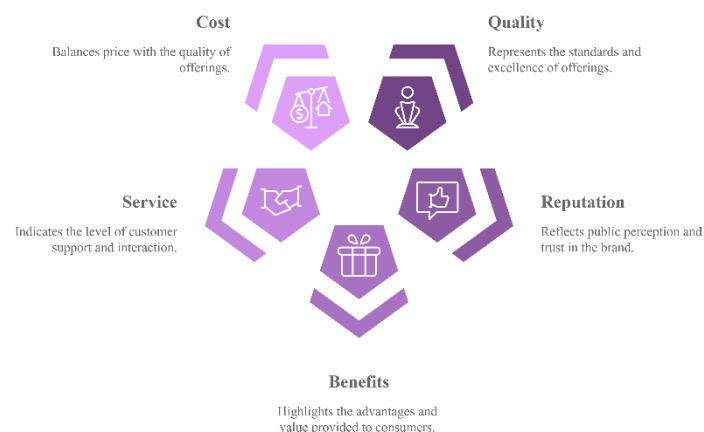


Figure 3. Five Key Factors Shape Brand Schiffman and Kanuk

Interest and Its Relationship with Image

Understanding consumer behavior is crucial for organizations to design effective marketing strategies, including introducing and promoting their products. These strategies must be grounded in an analysis of consumer needs and preferences [25]. According to Slamento, interest is a person's liking or attraction towards something, characterized by heightened attention to a particular object. The stronger the enjoyment or interest, the greater the individual's attraction to the subject [26].

Interest in enrolling in a school can be likened to interest in purchasing a service, as both involve intangible offerings that cannot be physically seen, touched, smelled, heard, or felt like physical products [21]. In service marketing theory, Kotler and Keller describe purchase interest as behavior that emerges in response to an object, reflecting the consumer's desire to make a purchase. In education, the "consumer" is the student, whose desire to choose a school mirrors this concept.

Students' interest and decision-making in selecting a school reflect their conscious desire to find the best educational institution, driven by their needs and expectations for quality

education. Interest is a psychological aspect that motivates individuals to achieve specific goals, encompassing the desire to learn and explore what they are interested in. It is shaped by the alignment between an individual's conditions and needs, creating a strong drive that influences attention and action towards an object. The findings of this study indicate that a positive school image significantly influences students' interest in continuing their education at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah. This aligns with Kotler and Keller's view that a positive brand image increases the likelihood of consumers choosing a product [27]. Thus, the better the school's image, the greater its influence on public interest.

A school's image reflects the quality of education it offers, a primary concern for stakeholders such as government authorities, education offices, teachers, parents, and students. Similar to commercial products, educational institutions are perceived as service providers whose quality is considered by prospective "consumers," the students. They tend to choose schools perceived to offer the best standards. Therefore, building a positive school image is a crucial step in attracting public interest and increasing enrollment numbers [28]. In the competitive landscape among madrasahs, a positive image serves not only as an attraction but also as a means to demonstrate and maintain the established quality of education. A strong image is expected to enhance a madrasah's appeal, resulting in increased interest among prospective students and greater enrollment.

In Islam, a good image is exemplified by the character of Prophet Muhammad SAW, who was known as *Al-Amin*, meaning "the trustworthy." Educational institutions must emulate this by fostering a positive image for madrasahs, thereby creating a perception of trustworthiness among the community and attracting interest from consumers of educational services. A relevant Quranic verse addressing personal and institutional integrity is found in *Surah As-Syu'ara* (26:181-183): *"Give full measure and do not be among those who cause loss (181). And weigh with an even balance (182). And do not deprive people of their due and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption (183)"* [29]. These verses emphasize that one of the key ethical principles in maintaining public trust in an institution or madrasah is honesty, without engaging in manipulative practices that harm others or lead to dissatisfaction among consumers. A decline in public trust towards a school can directly diminish the community's interest in enrolling their children there.

After earning the trust of the community, the next responsibility of educational institutions is to uphold the image they have established. This is emphasized in *Surah An-Nisa* (4:58): *Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you. Indeed, Allah is ever Hearing and Seeing* [30]. The verse highlights the importance of trustworthiness (*amanah*), which entails taking responsibility in fulfilling duties. For educational institutions that build an image and communicate it to the public, this trust must be upheld with accountability for promises made. Maintaining this integrity ensures that the institution's image remains intact and continues to positively impact its development.

To shape and enhance the image of MAN 1 Lampung Tengah in influencing students' interest to pursue education at the institution, various efforts have been undertaken. These include improving the quality of teaching staff, achieving notable accomplishments among teachers and students, enhancing services for learners, and producing highly capable alumni. To develop students' skills and competencies, MAN 1 Lampung Tengah offers flagship

programs such as academic excellence classes, olympiad and research excellence classes, *tahfiz* (Quran memorization) excellence classes, and regular classes.

Additionally, MAN 1 Lampung Tengah organizes routine activities such as congregational *Dhuha* prayers, *Dzuhur* prayers, Quran recitation, and collective supplication before lessons begin. Programs like Quran improvement (*tahsinul Quran*), Quran memorization (*tahfidzul Quran*), public speaking (*muhadharah*), tutoring, extracurricular activities, and others further enrich the institution's environment. The image of MAN 1 Lampung Tengah is also bolstered by its "A" accreditation from BAN-SM and its students' remarkable achievements in various extracurricular domains, including academics, arts, sports, health, religion, and other areas of excellence. These accomplishments collectively contribute to a positive perception of the institution, fostering increased trust and interest from the community.

Thus, the various components shaping an institution's image become crucial considerations for students in making decisions about their choice of school. The better the image of the madrasah, the greater the trust it inspires in students, leading to stronger confidence in their decision. Students will be less hesitant to solidify their choice. Keller highlights the connection between image and purchase interest, asserting that a positive image significantly increases the likelihood of consumer preference for a particular brand. Consequently, the more positive the image of a madrasah, the greater the positive impact on public interest [21]. Similarly, Ahmad Jalaludin argues that the better the image of an institution, the more it attracts prospective students to enroll [31].

The influence of the madrasah's image on students' interest, as investigated in this study, aligns with the findings of a previous study titled "*The Influence of Students' Perceptions of School Image and Environment on Their Interest in Choosing Al-Istiqamah Private Senior High School in Pasaman Barat Regency*" by Taufik Hidayat. The study found a significant influence of students' perceptions of school image on their interest, accounting for 26.1%, and the influence of the school environment at 73.3% [32].

The differences between this study and the aforementioned research lie in several aspects. First, the number of variables: the prior study utilized three variables (X1, X2, and Y), whereas this study employs only two variables (X and Y). Second, the research location differs, with this study focusing on MAN 1 Lampung Tengah, while the previous research examined Al-Istiqamah Private Senior High School in Pasaman Barat Regency. Finally, the regression analysis methods differ, as this study applies simple linear regression due to its two-variable model, while the prior research employed multiple linear regression analysis. Thus, based on field data analysis, this study demonstrates a significant influence of the madrasah's image on students' interest in continuing their education at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a significant positive relationship between the perception of Islamic schools and students' interest in continuing education at MAN 1 Lampung Tengah. The statistical analysis supports this conclusion, with a t-test value t_{count} of 4.587, surpassing the critical t-value t_{table} of 1.652, and a significance level of 0.00, confirming the results' reliability. The F-test further validated these findings, showing $F_{count} = 21.045$, which exceeded $F_{table} = 2.730$, also with a significance level of 0.00. These results led to the acceptance of the

alternative hypothesis (H_1), establishing that school perception significantly influences students' interest. The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicated that 28.7% of the variation in students' interest is attributable to school perception, while the regression equation $Y = 37.458 + 0.307X$ highlighted the positive impact of an improved perception. These findings imply that a positive perception of Islamic schools fosters trust, enhances enrollment rates, and strengthens community engagement, contributing to better educational outcomes. However, the study faced certain limitations, including reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias, and the focus on a single institution, limiting the findings' generalizability. Future studies could expand the scope to include multiple institutions and integrate qualitative methods for a more comprehensive understanding. For similar initiatives, involving broader stakeholders, such as parents and community leaders, is recommended to better capture factors influencing school perception. Additionally, sustained efforts to improve institutional image, such as promoting achievements and enhancing facilities, are essential for maintaining and increasing interest among prospective students.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

"The authors declare no conflict of interest."

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